



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

AN INTERESTING MATERIAL.



WHAT is alabaster?

I must confess I had no idea until recently. This cheesy sort of stone is so readily cut and so substantial, it has always been more or less of a favorite, and yet it has always been an unknown personality.

The fact that it is again coming into fashion and the probability of seeing great pitchers and urns standing around on floors, tables, and mantel, possibly is the reason my curiosity prompted the natural and easy solution of finding out.

Alabaster is both a petrification and a species of marble. Properly, it is a variety of gypsum or sulphate of lime occurring in one or two forms, but both of which present a semi-transparent texture and a softness of substance that enables them to be easily chiseled into ornamental forms. Some quarries of alabaster yield slabs or blocks large enough for statue work, others



ENDYMION.—SEE PAGE 114.

give specimens so transparent as to serve as a substitute for glass in windows. There is a church in Florence where each window consists of a single slab of white alabaster fifteen feet high. In very olden times the material was used to temper the sunlight entering the temples and to give it a rosy hue.

Some pieces of alabaster are hard as marble but those used for ornaments are generally of a softer nature and readily yield to the cutting tool. The process is very much such as is employed in more pretentious sculpturing, and consists in first cutting the stone into blocks by means of steel saws, fashioning with chisels and knives, smoothing with rasps and files, and polishing with a mixture of chalk, soap and milk applied with a bit of flannel.

Alabaster produced by petrification or deposition requires different treatment.

Many warm springs contain an abundance of carbonate or sulphate of lime, and when the water gushes forth to the light of day the carbonic acid escapes, and the sulphate of lime, or in other words the alabaster, deposits itself around the edge of the spring. The white substance is therefore formed naturally, but ingenuity has devised a means by which this natural formation may take an ornamental shape in its growth.

At one spring in Tuscany, some time ago, an observing Italian collected a number of plaster models from which he made sulphur moulds. These moulds were placed in a wooden vessel around the interior of which was a row of pegs on which the mould rested, and at the top of the vessel were placed cross-bars which partly closed the mouth. The vessel was then placed in the midst of the hot springs, with an attachment for preventing any disturbance of the position; the water on entering the tub was divided into separate streams by the cross-bars, which streams dashed against the moulds and deposited the earthy particles within the latter, until the whole surface of the mould became incrustated with alabaster.

According to the angle at which the mould was placed in the vessel, and the manner in which the water was made to fall upon it, so was the deposition varied in its character, but generally speaking, the alabaster so produced was equal in whiteness and hardness to Carrara marble. A period of from one to four months, according to the thickness of the alabaster desired, was necessary for the mould to remain undisturbed in the spring, as the deposition of alabastrine is rather slow.

At the termination of the specified time, the vessel was taken from the spring, the mould removed and the incrustation around it carefully broken away. A slight blow separated the mould from the alabaster cast, and this being rubbed slightly was at once finished and ready for whatsoever its use might be.

There is likewise a spring busy making alabaster in Peru. Boiling hot water rises from the ground holding an abundance of earthy particles suspended in the liquid. At a short distance from the pool it becomes cool and deposits calcareous matter in such vast quantities that not only may moulds of ornamental objects be filled with it, but large blocks are actually built up in the same way. The stone so received is hard, beautiful in texture and susceptible of receiving a high polish—even some of the local houses are constructed from it—buildings formed in water instead of glass.

By compelling the water to trickle through a colored substance before entering the moulds, colored alabaster is produced.

This is the source and origin of that very familiar object, the alabaster ornament.

A VALUABLE hint to some decorative artist may possibly be found in the statement which we find in a foreign technical journal that expressed oil of bay (*huile de laurier*) is extensively used in Switzerland by butchers to keep their shops free from flies, and that after a coat of oil has been applied to the walls none of these troublesome pests venture to put in an appearance. This remedy has also been tried and found effectual



THE OLD, OLD STORY.—SEE PAGE 114.

in the south of France in preserving gilt frames, chandeliers, etc., from becoming soiled: It is even remarked that flies soon avoid the rooms where this application has been employed.

THE Romans had a method of finishing the inside of rooms with tiles made to adhere by compressing the tile firmly against the freshly plastered wall. In some of the ruins lately exhumed in Rome these tiles are found yet adhering with a wonderful tenacity. They attained the art of ornamenting these by figures of various colors, burned into the tile and frequently covered with a colorless glazing.